

Government Orders

Although it is not the same type of structure, one knows that a bridge built over salt water is likely to be subjected to more damage than elsewhere. Therefore, the maintenance costs are likely to be proportionate to the location of this bridge, to the fact that it is an extremely long bridge located, one has to admit, in an area with a very harsh climate, in the heart of the gulf of St. Lawrence and subject to significant weather and climatic variations. It would therefore be useful to be given all the information regarding the responsibility of the government with respect to maintenance costs or in case of possible major structural failure.

These are matters which require some clarification. This project economically is so very important for this region. We must therefore ensure that it is a success in terms of both its construction and its operation.

I know that my colleagues opposite agree that it must be a success. But it is not enough to say it. It is not enough to say that we want it to be a success in terms of its construction and its maintenance, to be a success in social and economic terms, to be a success for the company that will be in charge of its operation, also for the government which is going to be watching people coming and going and which, with this structure, is going to link an isolated province with the continent. We all want that project to be a success in all those respects, but again, it is not enough to just say so.

The government must act in a responsible manner. It must give all the necessary explanations. It must look for every aspect, even the smallest one, which may be a problem or about which people may have concerns in order not to embark, once again, on an unending adventure which finally will result in all Canadian taxpayers paying for something which does not even work properly.

A lot of questions have been left unanswered. I think it is for the House, during this debate, to answer them.

• (1200)

In conclusion, I would like the people mandated by the minister to answer all those questions. Like my colleague from Bourassa, I would like to express my concern over the possible job losses—nearly 400 jobs, roughly 350 jobs—that this project entails, since the bridge's operation will not require as many employees as a ferry service.

I can understand why so many discussions were held with so many people. Before a company closes shop, there are always a lot of discussions between manpower centres, economic development corporations and other stakeholders, in order to find alternatives, retrain employees, etc. Such a situation results in a significant reduction of net employment in the area, where needs are great.

There is no assurance that the people will easily adapt to the necessary social reorganization because of job losses following this negative change. Will the bridge create a positive spin-off in terms of job creation for the residents of the Island and of New Brunswick? Maybe. We hope for the best but it is far from sure and I see a lot of ill defined areas in the whole employment issue. The government would do well to look more closely into it in order to come up with better answers than it did up to now.

[English]

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick comment on the member's speech.

First, there appears to be some confusion between him and the Leader of the Opposition on the environmental effects and the satisfaction on this. I trust that they will straighten out this apparent discrepancy.

I would also like to point out that many of the questions which he wished to pose to the minister were in fact replied to in the minister's address. I do not know whether the hon. member was here at the time. Perhaps he was talking to a colleague. However, many of the questions that were raised were, as I understand it, from at least a failure to appreciate what the minister was saying.

The hon. member mentions the absence of the minister. I would like to point out that almost immediately behind the minister sits his parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for St. Boniface. I believe it is important for all members to recognize the tremendous support that ministers receive from their parliamentary secretaries. These members accept additional responsibilities and do a tremendous job, particularly on detailed questions such as the one the member put.

While I do not wish to build up the hon. member's performance to levels of high expectation, we fully expect all questions of this type to be very carefully analysed and dealt with by the parliamentary secretary.

I have a parliamentary secretary sitting just behind the member for St. Boniface and she is of immense help in debates such as this in dealing with questions. When she speaks on such questions I want it known, just as when the member for St. Boniface speaks on such questions, that these people are acting on behalf of the minister. In fact, quite often they speak more eloquently than ministers. We are very happy with the support that is given.

I am sure the hon. member will want to correct the impression given that somehow the parliamentary secretary is not able to handle the questions he put. I know full well that when the parliamentary secretary rises to speak we will have a detailed and careful analysis of the questions. The hon. member I am sure, being a man who is very fair in his approach in the House, will find the answers extremely acceptable.